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Strengthening of the United Nations system

Report of the Secretary-General in response to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations

Executive summary

The present report has been prepared in response to the report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations (A/58/817 and Corr.1). It offers comments on some of the Panel's recommendations from the perspective of the United Nations Secretariat and, in some cases, makes specific suggestions regarding their implementation, which the General Assembly may wish to take into account.

The Secretary-General commends the report of the Panel to the attention of the General Assembly. Expanding and deepening the relationship with non-governmental organizations will further strengthen both the United Nations and the intergovernmental debates on issues of global importance. The Panel makes a compelling case for the United Nations to become a more outward-looking organization. Another important theme is the need for the United Nations to "connect the global with the local". Building on the Panel's proposals, the present report makes a number of concrete suggestions and actions in connection with increasing the participation of non-governmental organizations in intergovernmental bodies, the accreditation process, improving the involvement of non-governmental organizations from developing countries and strengthening of the institutional capacity of the United Nations for engagement with non-governmental organizations.

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I. Introduction

1. My report of two years ago, "Strengthening the United Nations: an agenda for further change" (A/57/387 and Corr.1), reflected on the growing importance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)[1] to the work of the United Nations:

> "The expanding worldwide networks of non-governmental organizations embrace virtually every level of organization, from the village community to global summits, and almost every sector of public life, from the provision of microcredit and the delivery of emergency relief supplies, to environmental and human rights activism".

2. As I pointed out in that report, the relationship between the United Nations and NGOs is as old as the Charter itself. Yet the system for facilitating this interaction needs to be strengthened. This is why I appointed, in February 2003, a panel of eminent persons, chaired by the former President of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. The Panel has worked diligently over the past year — taking stock of existing practice, consulting widely with interested parties and proposing better ways of managing United Nations-civil society relations. The Panel's report (see A/58/817 and Corr.1) was launched on 21 June 2004 and contains 30 specific proposals for reform and improvement.

3. At the outset, it is important to stress that the United Nations is and will remain an intergovernmental organization at which decisions are taken by its Member States. The Panel's valuable suggestions can be taken in the context of the ongoing process of modernization and institutional change that the Organization has undergone in the past decade. Expanding and deepening the relationship with NGOs will further strengthen both the institution and the intergovernmental debate. This is an opportunity for the United Nations to enhance its impact in a world that is remarkably different from the one in which it was founded nearly 60 years ago.

4. In its very first proposal, the Panel argues convincingly that the United Nations should become a more outward-looking organization, making more of its role as a global convenor of diverse constituencies relevant to an issue. I fully agree that expanding United Nations consultations with different constituencies and facilitating their input into relevant debates of global significance can only enhance the quality and depth of policy analysis and actionable outcomes, including in the form of partnerships. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can help the United Nations to devise innovative answers to critical questions. In the same way, the deliberations of United Nations meetings can become richer and more diverse, yet grounded in reality. More effective engagement with NGOs also increases the likelihood that United Nations decisions will be better understood and supported by a broad and diverse public.

5. Another important theme of the Panel's report, which I welcome, is the need for the United Nations to "connect the global with the local". The Millennium Development Goals have been instrumental in bringing cohesion to the functioning of the United Nations system at the country level and in aligning its operations with the development agenda emerging from the major United Nations conferences and

[1] For the purposes of the present document, the term "non-governmental organization" is used in accordance with traditional United Nations parlance, consistent with the reference made in Article 71 of the Charter of the United Nations.

summit meetings. Achievement of the Millennium Development Goals will depend on a collaborative approach made possible through partnerships with Governments and NGOs on the ground. Focusing attention on the Goals also provides an opportunity for local country-level realities to impact on global deliberations.

6. I commend the report of the Panel to the attention of the General Assembly and express the hope that its recommendations will receive the careful and positive consideration that they deserve. The present report offers comments on some of the Panel's recommendations from the perspective of the United Nations Secretariat and, in some cases, makes specific suggestions regarding their implementation, which the Assembly may wish to take into account. The report is structured around the following seven headings:

- Increasing the participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies;
- Establishing a trust fund to increase the participation of representatives of NGOs from developing countries;
- Improving the accreditation;
- Improving the United Nations Secretariat's dialogue with NGOs;
- Enhancing country-level engagement with NGOs;
- Exploring the enlargement of the Partnerships Office;
- Managing the change process.

II. Increasing the participation of non-governmental organizations in intergovernmental bodies

7. The participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies has dramatically increased in recent years, particularly as a result of and during the major international conferences and their 5-year and 10-year reviews. NGOs are now commonly present at the intergovernmental deliberations of many of the organizations of the United Nations system and participate in a broad range of advisory mechanisms and partnerships. A variety of modalities for NGO participation have been developed over the past 15 years.

8. The extent to which NGOs are able to organize themselves around broad networks focusing on specific issues will have a bearing on the form and impact of their involvement in the work of the Organization. There have been many examples in the past of such successful networks, the existence of which has greatly facilitated the consultative process. I welcome proposal 23 in the Panel's report, which stresses that the main constituencies of NGOs should themselves take steps to form groups or broad networks for participation in United Nations activities. Such groups would make it much easier to conduct the issue-based, multi-constituency processes which the Panel recommends in proposal 5.

A. General Assembly

9. The General Assembly and its main committees have increasingly involved NGOs in their deliberations, both informally, through round-table meetings and panel discussions, and formally, through invitations to the special sessions and

conferences convened under its auspices, and, more recently, through the biennial high-level dialogue. Thus, the Assembly is already moving to some extent in the direction described in proposal 6.

10. I share the view expressed by the Panel, however, that the Organization would benefit from extending and standardizing these practices, so that they become a regular component of the General Assembly's work. For example, prior to major events, the Assembly could institute the practice of holding interactive hearings between Member States and NGO representatives that have the necessary expertise on the issues on the agenda. In the coming year, such a hearing could be "piloted" before the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, which is to be held on 2 June 2005. Views could be shared on the progress made in implementing the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS.[2]

11. The General Assembly could also agree to convene a two-day, informal, interactive hearing with NGOs prior to the opening of the Assembly each year, centred around an agenda to be determined in consultations among the President of the Assembly, the Bureau of the Assembly and NGO representatives. This practice could be initiated on a trial basis for the sixtieth session of the Assembly and evaluated after five years, to coincide with the 10-year review of the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

12. Questions regarding accreditation and the rights and responsibilities pertaining to NGO participation in the General Assembly are discussed in section IV of the present report.

B. Security Council

13. In proposal 12, the Panel encouraged the Security Council to increase its contact with NGOs. The Council has taken a number of steps in that direction in recent years. There has been more frequent recourse to the Arria formula[3] for consultations with NGOs. In 2004 alone, the Council has invited NGO representatives and the business sector to participate in two open debates: one on the role of business in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building and the other on the role of civil society in post-conflict peace-building. Also, Security Council members, during their recent mission to West Africa, interacted extensively with key NGO constituencies throughout the mission.

14. I encourage the Security Council to find ways to strengthen further its relationship with civil society. Additional funding could be made available from either the trust fund referred to in section III of the present report or from United Nations country teams to increase the participation of NGO actors from the field in the meetings of the Council. I have also noted the Panel's recommendation that independent commissions of inquiry be established after Council-mandated operations. I believe that such a formal mechanism could be reserved for special cases. The Council may wish, however, to adopt the practice of conducting some form of assessment, with input from selected NGOs, following the completion of each peace mission.

[2] General Assembly resolution S-26/2, annex.

[3] Informal meetings called and hosted by one of the members of the Security Council with one or more NGO or other experts, but with no minutes.

C. Economic and Social Council

15. In recent years, the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions have significantly intensified their involvement of civil society, including accredited NGOs, foundations, parliamentarians and local authorities, and with the private sector. This has enriched the proceedings of the Council and its subsidiary bodies. The Council has launched several successful multi-stakeholder initiatives, including the Information and Communication Technologies Task Force. Likewise, the Commission on Sustainable Development engaged civil society representatives throughout its review session of 2004. This practice could be emulated in other subsidiary bodies of the Council and by the Council itself.

D. Parliamentarians

16. The engagement of parliamentarians in the work of the United Nations has taken many forms over the years. Their participation in national delegations and through various parliamentary organizations has helped bring the Organization closer to citizens and their elected representatives. The Inter-Parliamentary Union has played a particularly active role in fostering a more sustained interaction between the United Nations and parliamentarians, a role which was recognized by the General Assembly when it granted the Union the status of observer.

17. I agree that more should be done to strengthen the Organization's links to parliaments and parliamentarians. Proposals 13 to 16 identify a number of steps, which I commend to the attention of the General Assembly. As an initial step, it may also wish to organize or support meetings of parliamentarians, in 2005, to discuss the issues before the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, which is to be held on 2 June 2005. In addition, the Assembly may wish to recommend, organize or support meetings of parliamentarians at the national, regional or global levels early in 2006, to provide input to the meeting to review the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, scheduled for later in that year. With experience, such meetings could evolve into the global public policy forums mentioned in proposal 15.

E. Local authorities

18. The United Nations has always interacted with local authorities as key partners, especially on development and humanitarian work at the local level. For most of the world's population, it is their local authority that has most direct influence on their lives in areas such as water and sanitation, education and health services. In the past decade, global networks of local authorities have been created, most notably the United Cities and Local Governments, which greatly facilitate the dialogue of organized local authorities with the United Nations and other international forums. Moreover, the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities was established in 2000 to strengthen the international dialogue with local authorities on development issues, especially in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

19. The direct participation of local authorities in the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has also been broadened. This is a welcome trend, and I encourage Member States to continue

facilitating the participation of local authorities and their associations in intergovernmental bodies. Again, if the General Assembly decides to hold a hearing before the high-level meeting on HIV/AIDS, it may wish to invite local authorities and their associations. The United Nations will continue to explore opportunities to strengthen engagement with local authorities, especially through the work of UN-Habitat, and also through the United Nations country teams and other parts of the broader United Nations system.

III. Establishing a trust fund to increase the participation of representatives of non-governmental organizations from developing countries

20. As highlighted in the Panel's report, the increase in the participation of NGOs in intergovernmental bodies is rather unbalanced: NGOs from developing countries are underrepresented. This is partly a result of the lack of resources of NGOs from developing countries to cover travel and accommodation costs. At the same time, I am encouraged to note that the number of developing country NGOs in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council has increased in the past decade. For example, African-based NGOs now make up 11 per cent of the total — up from 4 per cent in 1996. Overall, 30 per cent of NGOs in consultative status with the Council have their headquarters in the developing world, partly as a result of the Secretariat's efforts.

21. The participation of developing country representatives in the recent global conferences has been assisted by generous support from a series of conference-specific trust funds. Such a fund does not exist, however, to finance participation in the Economic and Social Council, its subsidiary bodies and other intergovernmental meetings. Consequently, the level of attendance of NGO representatives from developing countries in standing United Nations meetings is low.

22. I will create a single trust fund that will provide financial support for the travel and accommodation of representatives of accredited NGOs from developing countries to attend intergovernmental meetings, in accordance with proposal 27 of the Panel. Existing trust funds which support participation in specific intergovernmental processes would be subsumed into the new fund. A detailed cost plan, criteria for support and procedures for administering the fund will be developed in consultation with stakeholders. I encourage Member States to contribute generously to this fund.

IV. Improving accreditation

23. In its report, the Panel makes a number of recommendations regarding NGO accreditation. To summarize, the Panel proposes that:

(a) NGOs be accredited to participate in the work of the General Assembly;

(b) A single accreditation process be established for all United Nations forums;

(c) A committee of the General Assembly be given the responsibility to review all NGO applications for accreditation;

(d) The process of accreditation be streamlined;

(e) The rights and responsibilities pertaining to NGO participation be reviewed and harmonized.

24. I would like to offer the following comments and suggestions under each of these headings.

A. Granting non-governmental organizations accreditation to participate in the work of the General Assembly

25. Article 71 of the Charter provides that the Economic and Social Council may make suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs which are concerned with matters within its competence. There is nothing in Article 71 that would preclude the General Assembly from inviting NGOs to participate in its sessions and its work. There is considerable merit in opening the regular work of the Assembly to increased participation by accredited NGOs. This is already taking place informally through panels, round-table meetings, and NGO involvement in the preparatory work of the international conferences, the special sessions and high-level dialogue of the Assembly. One possible option could be to start with accreditation to the main committees, leaving for consideration at a subsequent stage the question of accreditation to the plenary. If the Assembly decides in favour of accrediting NGOs to its main committees, the rights and responsibilities pertaining to participation would then need to be defined.

B. Establishing a single system of accreditation

26. A single system of NGO accreditation for all United Nations intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and conferences, based on one set of agreed-upon criteria, would have the benefit of simplicity, consistency and efficiency, as is well argued in the Panel's report. It would also facilitate the involvement of NGOs in the consideration of complex issues whose ramifications span many intergovernmental organs.

27. Concerning the Panel's proposal to consolidate the Economic and Social Council and Department of Public Information processes, closer examination reveals that there is an important distinction to be made between the accreditation process, governing the relationship between NGOs and intergovernmental bodies, and the association process, which grants NGOs the right to access United Nations documents, facilities and communication materials. One is clearly an intergovernmental process while the other is not. There does not seem to be much merit in attempting to consolidate either the processes or the internal United Nations structures that handle them.

C. A committee of the General Assembly responsible for all applications for accreditation

28. While Article 71 allows the Economic and Social Council to make suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs, the Charter does not designate a specific mechanism or body for the accreditation of NGOs. Moreover, while pursuant to Council resolution 3 (II) of 21 June 1946, the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations is the intergovernmental organ designated to consider applications for consultative status with the Council, the Assembly, if it so decides, could adopt and assume responsibility for a single accreditation system. An existing committee of the General Assembly, perhaps the General Committee, could be designated for this purpose.

D. Streamlining the accreditation process

29. Whether or not Member States decide to accept the three changes outlined above, a number of procedural changes could be made which would significantly improve the efficiency of the accreditation process.

30. The Panel indicates that the current process is slow, costly and subject to a "happenstance of workloads", with the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, currently made up of 19 Member States, making recommendations on a case-by-case basis for accreditation to the Economic and Social Council. The considerable backlog of applications is overwhelming an already overloaded process.

31. Some efforts have been made to improve the process. For example, an electronic meeting management and documentation system (a paperless committee) was recently introduced, and criteria and requirements for accreditation now appear on the United Nations web site. The Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations itself has done commendable work in improving its own working methods — streamlining the NGO questionnaire, issuing guidance to NGOs on reporting and monitoring and restructuring its meeting schedule for greater effectiveness. Similar improvements have been brought to the accreditation process for large global conferences. A number of funds and programmes and specialized agencies have also established new practices for accrediting NGOs.

32. There is nevertheless considerable scope for further simplification. I welcome the suggestions of the Panel, which, if implemented, would go a long way towards simplifying the process of accreditation. In essence, in paragraph 131 of its report, the Panel proposes two key improvements:

(a) The United Nations Secretariat should be tasked with conducting a thorough pre-screening of NGO applications for accreditation, according to clear criteria determined by an intergovernmental body;

(b) Member States should be provided with consolidated lists of applications for consideration.

E. Rights and responsibilities pertaining to participation

33. Proposals 22 and 23 of the Panel relate to the various categories of NGO status (general, special and Roster) and the differences in the rights of participation for each. These categories have been in existence for several decades, notwithstanding some minor changes introduced in 1996. There would be merit in reviewing the categories and the privileges associated with them — particularly in the light of informal practices which have evolved in recent years. Also, the General Assembly may wish to consider establishing a uniform regime of rights and responsibilities pertaining to the participation of NGOs in global conferences and special sessions of the General Assembly.

34. At the same time, the question of the responsibilities and accountability of the NGOs arises. For example, there are currently large numbers of NGOs in consultative status with the United Nations that are not complying with the requirement to submit quadrennial reports on their activities and how they relate to the overall goals and objectives of the global community. Member States may wish to explore the possibility of drawing up a code of conduct, mentioned in proposal 23 of the Panel, as an instrument to ensure that NGOs commit themselves to the aims of the Charter and act in a manner that reflects the intergovernmental character of the Organization.

V. Improving the United Nations Secretariat's dialogue with non-governmental organizations

35. The Panel suggests many ways in which the Secretariat can intensify its own dialogue with the NGO community. It suggests, in particular, a global Internet agora to survey public opinion and raise awareness on emerging issues (proposal 3) and public hearings to review the progress made in meeting globally agreed commitments (proposal 5). The United Nations Secretariat and other United Nations organizations already interact with NGOs in a variety of ways. I intend to review these experiences and the Panel's proposals, in consultation with NGOs, with a view to determining how best to intensify our dialogue with them.

36. The Panel also makes useful suggestions on how to promote and explain the work of the United Nations to a wide set of constituencies. The Department of Public Information currently maintains contacts with a vast network to which it disseminates information about the work of the Organization — most notably at the traditional NGO conference that it organizes each year. Taking into consideration the proposed enhancements to NGO participation in intergovernmental debates, I am asking the Department to see how its work with NGOs could be better linked to the priorities of the intergovernmental organs so as to enhance its relevance and impact. It will also be important to ensure that the Department's outreach activities complement and support those of the substantive departments, funds and programmes.

37. There are several other internal measures that will be taken to improve the Secretariat's dialogue with NGOs. These include, among other things, establishing a central database of NGOs and developing a body of best practices relating to NGO involvement in United Nations activities so that they can be replicated throughout the broader United Nations system. In addition, access to official documentation

will be greatly facilitated by the provision of free access to the Official Document System by the end of 2004.

VI. Enhancing country-level engagement with non-governmental organizations

38. I welcome the emphasis placed by the Panel on all branches of the United Nations system engaging with civil society at the country level. This is a relationship that has evolved considerably over the past three decades. NGOs now act as fully fledged partners in programme design and implementation and increasingly provide policy advice, analysis and advocacy. In crisis and post-conflict countries in particular, national and international NGOs are vital implementing partners, without which United Nations humanitarian assistance could not be delivered. They are also key participants in peace-building, reconciliation and transitions to civilian administration. Of course, Governments remain the main interlocutors for country-level engagement with the United Nations.

39. The participation of civil society in the development of national policies is critical to ensuring national ownership and relevance. The United Nations Development Group has been facilitating broad consultation with and participation of NGOs and other stakeholders in the poverty reduction strategy paper process — achieving, in a number of cases, pro-poor outcomes with genuine engagement in a fully consultative process.

40. Greater system-wide focus on implementation of the Millennium Development Goals has further strengthened relations with civil society. The United Nations country teams are supporting Governments and civil society organizations in developing and revising the Millennium Development Goal reports in about 60 countries. In addition, the regional commissions are addressing issues of data comparability and policy coherence, to which NGOs have another important contribution to make. In a growing number of countries, civil society groups are spearheading advocacy campaigns for the Millennium Development Goals, both individually and in partnership with the country teams. NGOs are also key actors in making progress on the ground, for example, towards the achievement of the Goals.

41. The United Nations system is also encouraging the engagement of NGOs in the preparation of the common country assessments and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. However, the nature and extent of their participation is uneven, reflecting a need to develop additional capacity in conducting policy dialogue and analysis and programme implementation. Where capacity is devoted to multi-stakeholder processes, the pay-offs have been significant. Resources and leadership will be needed, however, to ensure that today's best practices become the standard practices in the future.

A. Enhancing the capacity of non-governmental organizations at the country level

42. There are a number of promising measures already under way to enhance the capacity of NGOs at the country level. I intend to strengthen and replicate these initiatives in other locations. The Millennium Development Goal and poverty reduction strategy paper and processes are key opportunities for the United Nations Development Group to ensure that the rhetoric is put into practice — allowing adequate space for all constituencies, including parliamentarians and local authorities, to contribute to the goals of Governments as agreed at the United Nations. United Nations country teams should continue to facilitate the participation of NGOs in campaigning for and monitoring the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and using the goals as benchmarks for the national poverty reduction strategy and poverty reduction strategy paper processes. In almost all countries, various parts of the United Nations system periodically fund workshops and learning exchanges with NGOs — with particular emphasis on poverty reduction strategy paper processes and Millennium Development Goal reporting and advocacy. The United Nations has also supported the formation of umbrella groups of NGOs in many sectors, particularly in primary health care. An NGO champions initiative for resident coordinators and resident representatives was launched in October 2003 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with 32 countries already participating.

43. The United Nations is also making real progress in its efforts to disseminate information about the work of the United Nations to all partners and constituencies. Use of easily accessible web sites, such as the national database in the United Republic of Tanzania, and ensuring the participation of NGOs in knowledge networks and discussion groups are encouraging first steps.

B. Enhancing the capacity of the United Nations resident coordinator system to engage with civil society

44. The Panel recognized the pivotal role played by the resident coordinator system in bringing together key United Nations system partners and civil society organizations in pursuit of national goals. I fully endorse the Panel's recommendations on the need for greater capacity among resident coordinators to identify, convene and broker key partnerships (proposals 10 and 11).

45. I have asked all resident coordinators to identify a qualified professional with relevant development experience to serve as a civil society focal point for the United Nations Development Group, who would coordinate civil society engagement by United Nations agencies in each country, with an additional dedicated staff member to be appointed to the office of the resident coordinator as soon as resources allow (proposals 11 and 25). Equally, resident coordinators will be asked to conduct orientation courses, where required, with a view to developing or enhancing partnerships with multiple constituencies (proposals 7 and 28).

46. I am encouraged by the Panel's recognition that the creation of NGO advisory groups at the country level to guide implementation of United Nations strategies would be beneficial (proposal 11). UNDP launched a pilot committee in Botswana in 2003, and I have asked that more resident coordinators constitute similar

committees, bringing together development experts from NGOs, academia, the media and local authorities in a forum for policy advice and participation. I believe this can be an effective means by which we can systematically support government by engaging NGOs and bridging the gulf between the deliberative and implementation aspects of our work.

47. I will establish a trust fund, inviting support from bilateral donors and foundations, to enhance the capacity of NGOs at the country level and to finance additional capacity in the office of the resident coordinator. A working group of the United Nations Development Group, chaired by UNDP as administrator of the fund, will guide the use of the fund (providing, for example, seed money for country teams that propose innovative initiatives) and develop strategies to promote further enhanced engagement with NGOs. The United Nations Development Group will work closely with the expanded Partnerships Office in the Secretariat, which should be a member of the aforementioned working group.

VII. Exploring the enlargement of the Partnerships Office[4]

48. As part of my second reform package from 2002, I decided to establish a Partnerships Office to bring the United Nations Fund for International Partnerships and the Global Compact Office under the same institutional umbrella. The Office is in the process of being established and an Assistant Secretary-General position was recently authorized by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for the purpose of providing it with high-level leadership. The Panel's proposal to broaden the scope of the Partnerships Office to include other constituencies merits consideration. Included in an expanded Partnerships Office could be a small unit to develop organizational policy with respect to NGOs, the existing Non-Governmental Liaison Service, an Accreditation Unit and an Elected Representatives Liaison Unit.

49. The Non-Governmental Liaison Service currently provides information and outreach in regard to the work of the United Nations. The Panel points out that the Service is highly respected throughout the NGO community and is perceived as an objective and very useful source of expertise, guidance to the United Nations system focal points and the country teams, and support to NGOs that engage in United Nations meetings and events. However, it is now subject to the vagaries of voluntary funding and faces increasing difficulty in financing its budget from existing funding sources. Incorporating it into the Partnerships Office would give it greater institutional standing and funding stability. However, this would be dependent on the agreement of the 17 existing sponsors and related decisions on funding arrangements.

50. In addition, separate units for accreditation and liaison with elected representatives could be created to complement and support the initiatives mentioned in sections II and IV of the present report. This would be consistent with proposals 16 and 20 of the Panel.

[4] The Panel proposed the establishment of an Office of Constituency Engagement and Partnerships. For purposes of simplicity and given that the Secretary-General has recently established a Partnerships Office, the latter term will be used.

51. Evidently, organizational units dealing with NGOs, elected representatives and the private sector each have their unique identity and purpose, which would continue to dictate the policies and approaches that are best suited to their particular needs. It is, however, desirable to have an institutional anchor, a greater coherence of approaches and stronger direction provided to the currently dispersed units dealing with the different facets of the Organization's interface with various partners. The Partnerships Office could be a central hub in a decentralized system and provide a single, more visible entry point for NGOs, while substantive departments, funds and programmes retain their own outreach and collaborative arrangements. The Office could also better foster the exchange of experience and collective learning.

52. I do not agree with the Panel's proposal to incorporate the secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues into this structure (see proposal 24). From a substantive perspective, it would be difficult to argue in favour of this particular thematic area over others. The secretariat provides substantive and conference-servicing support to the Forum, which has a clear and direct reporting line to the Economic and Social Council. This makes the secretariat's current location in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs logical and institutionally consistent.

VIII. Managing the change process

53. Changes foreseen in the present report require careful management and oversight to ensure that genuine improvements to the relationship between the United Nations and NGOs are achieved. To this end, improvements are needed in four particular areas.

54. First, there is a need for a more organized and sustained dialogue with the NGO community, in particular as regards the implementation of the present report but also on the broad range of issues to which NGOs have an important contribution to make. While the Partnerships Office could assume an important coordination role, it is the responsibility of departments, funds and programmes to ensure that the constituencies interested in their areas of concern are systematically consulted.

55. Second, constituency engagement and partnership concerns must be incorporated into the Organization's human resource processes, including recruitment, promotion and annual appraisal (see proposal 28). Staff at all levels will be offered training to improve their skills in dealing with broader constituencies and factor NGO considerations into their work, using, in particular, the United Nations System Staff College for this purpose.

56. Third, the implementation of these measures will require modest yet essential resources. As far as possible, I intend to build on existing capacities and make better use of existing resources for enhancing the engagement between the United Nations and NGOs. However, enlargement of the Partnerships Office would have some modest budgetary implications in the context of the budget for the biennium 2006-2007. I also appeal to Member States to make generous voluntary contributions to the trust funds which will be established for the specific purposes outlined in sections III and VI of the present report.

57. Finally, I wish to stress that I am committed to providing the leadership necessary for these changes to take effect and I will be stressing their importance to

my senior managers and the heads of United Nations agencies, in my capacity as head of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (proposal 29).

58. I will report to the General Assembly periodically on the implementation of the various reforms set out in the present report.